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By Grace You Have Been Saved—

Now What?



By
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By Grace You Have Been Saved—Now What?

“For **by grace you have been saved through faith**, and this especially is not of your own selves; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9; *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order* is used throughout except where noted).

Protestants typically interpret this passage to mean that no *works* are required for salvation—that all one needs to do is “accept Jesus” and receive God’s grace. But is this what the Bible actually teaches?

Most assuredly, salvation is *by grace*—God’s unmerited favor. Salvation *cannot* be “earned” by “good works” of any kind. But is there anything you must first *do* in order to receive salvation? Likewise, is there anything you must *do* after you have been “saved”? And what exactly does it mean to be “saved”?

This booklet will show from the Scriptures that while salvation *is* by God’s freely given grace, there are definite *conditions* which must be met *before* God will grant spiritual salvation. We will also see that there are *obligations* placed on the believer *after* he or she comes “under grace.”

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us—for you personally—to fill in His coming government. “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High...” (Dan. 7:27). “[And] they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4).

Is this promise important enough to you that you’ll diligently seek God, His love, and the *growth* He wants you to make in preparation for that office? Please realize that *you can* “**do all things through Christ**” (Phil. 4:13). Now is the time to accept God’s freely given grace, and *grow* in it. Now is the time to be diligently about the business of *working with* God to build “Christ in you.”

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faithful, will not permit you to be tempted beyond what you are able *to bear*; but with the temptation [or trial], He will make a way of escape, so that you may be able to bear *it*" (I Cor. 10:13). Like King David of old, you must learn to rely on God for help and deliverance, crying out, "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusts in You; yea, **in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge until these great troubles pass by**" (Psa. 57:1). You must, like David, learn to say, "I will sing of Your power; yea, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning; for **You have been my strong tower and refuge in the day of my trouble**" (Psa. 59:16).

Such trial and testing is part of what Paul calls **going on to "perfection"** (Heb. 6:1). Christ Himself forewarned us of this process: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. He takes away every branch in Me *that* does not bear fruit; **but He cleanses [prunes] each one that bears fruit, in order that it may bear more fruit....** In this is My Father glorified, **that you bear much fruit**" (John 15:1-2, 8). What kind of fruit does God desire? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23).

The real *key* to **going on to perfection** is a growing, intimate relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. This requires deep personal study of the Bible, heartfelt prayer, focused meditation, fasting and obedience. Notice what the apostle John wrote concerning our spiritual relationship with God: "That which we have seen and have heard we are reporting to you in order that you also may have fellowship with us; **for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—is with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ**" (I John 1:3). Christ, in what was one of His last prayers before His death, expressed this *fellowship* another way. He prayed that "they [the ones God has called from all ages] all may be one, even as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that **they also may be one in Us**, in order that the world may believe that You did send Me. And I have given them the glory that You gave *to* Me, in order **that they may be one**, in the same way *that* We are one: **I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one**; and that the world may know that You did send Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:21-23). This is how you become "**perfect, even as your Father Who is in heaven is perfect**" (Matt. 5:48).

God has an awesome, fantastic inheritance awaiting all the saints when Jesus Christ returns. He says, "And behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each one **according as his work shall be**" (Rev. 22:12). We are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). He has an important assignment for each of

Introduction

Almost anyone who claims to be a Christian—especially a Protestant—will tell you they are "saved." But *what is* salvation? Though entirely unbiblical, most believe that being "saved" means they have a one-way ticket to "heaven." Such "salvation," however, has little bearing on one's present day-to-day life.

What does the Bible *really* teach about salvation? Why exactly do we need to be "saved"—and saved from *what*? To truly understand, we must first briefly examine *why* God created man in the first place. Moreover, we must comprehend the sordid condition in which humanity presently finds itself.

After creating the heavens and the earth, God made the first man, Adam, from the dust of the ground—forming him in His own image (Gen. 1:27). Adam's subsequent sin, however, ushered in what the apostle Paul calls this "present evil world [age]" (Gal. 1:4), over which Satan, our enemy, *temporarily* rules as the "god of this world [age]" (II Cor. 4:4). Moreover, Adam's transgression brought sin and death to all mankind: "Therefore, as **by one man sin entered into the world, and by means of sin came death**; and in this way, **death passed into all mankind**; *and it is* for this reason that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Because of Adam's sin, the entire human family has inherited what Paul calls the "law" of sin and death (Rom. 7:17-24; 8:2). Thus, it is "**appointed unto men once to die**, and after this, *the judgment*" (Heb. 9:27).

Yet—as *few* realize—God has a great overall purpose for mankind. Incredibly, He is in the *process* of creating many spiritual sons and daughters in His very own image! The *physical* creation exists to support this ongoing process of *spiritual* creation—of bringing many spirit-born sons and daughters into God's family. "Because it was fitting for Him, for Whom all things *were created*, and by Whom all things *exist*, **in bringing many sons unto glory**, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He Who is sanctifying and those who are sanctified *are* all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:10-11). God says, "I will dwell in them and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.... And **I shall be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters...**" (II Cor. 6:16, 18). As the apostle Paul explains, those who are willingly led by God's Spirit are the children of God *now*—and are destined to become *glorified* sons and daughters at Jesus' return. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are [even now] the sons of God. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but

you have received the Spirit of sonship, whereby we call out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit itself bears witness conjointly with our own spirit, testifying that **we are the children of God. Now if we are children, we are also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—**if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that **we may also be glorified together with Him**” (Rom. 8:14-17).

Nevertheless, the human family is seemingly at an impasse: We were created to inherit eternity as members of God’s family, yet we are “sold under sin” and appointed unto death! Indeed, Paul writes that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and that “**the wages [what we all have *earned*] of sin is death...**” (Rom. 6:23). We all have the *death penalty* of sin hanging over us! But God has made a way for man to be delivered from this certain death. While the wages of sin is death, “the gift of God”—*the gift of His salvation by grace*—“is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Salvation, then, ultimately means *being delivered from death*—to live forever (through the first resurrection) as an *eternal* spirit being.

But what about the here and now—how does “being saved” affect your life in the present? What changes take place in your life when you become “saved”? Are you *only* saved from eternal death? As we have seen, Satan is the “god” of this present, evil age. However, true Christians—those who, as Jesus instructed, pray to be delivered from the “evil one” (Matt. 6:13)—are even now “**personally rescued**” from Satan’s “power of darkness” (Col. 1:13). Indeed, if you are “saved,” you are no longer subject to the “authority of Satan” (Acts 26:18).

Through salvation, God also has broken the power of sin in your life. As Paul wrote, “**sin shall not rule over you** because you are not under [the condemnation of the] law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Likewise, you are also “saved” from your own carnal mind—which was subject to the “law of sin and death.” Notice: “Consequently, *there is* now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who are not walking according to *the* flesh, but according to *the* Spirit; because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has **delivered me from the law of sin** and death” (Rom. 8:1-2). Moreover, as a “saved” Christian you are no longer part of this godless society: “[You] are not of the world...” (John 17:16; also see John 15:19). Christ proclaimed, “But be courageous! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33)—and thus stands ready to deliver you from this present evil society.

Indeed, the salvation of God is wonderful beyond description—and includes so much *more* than just being “saved” from eternal death. But how does God grant such salvation—and what is *required of you* if you are to receive God’s salvation by grace?

Conclusion

Going on to Perfection

You are *saved by grace*—not by any works you may have done or will do. You are expected to take that grace, freely given by God, and *grow* spiritually in preparation for His kingdom. You grow more like God the Father and Jesus Christ through regular prayer, Bible study, meditation and occasional fasting; you grow by fellowshiping with and serving fellow Christians; you grow by being taught by God’s true teaching servants—then *living by* what you learn. This involves giving up your sinful human ways and learning and living God’s way. It means changing your priorities, so that seeking God’s kingdom and growing more like Him are more important to you than *anything* else in life (Matt. 6:33).

But God has never promised that it would be easy—quite the contrary. Of living in this godless world, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you shall have tribulation** [distress, difficulties, problems]. But be courageous! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). And, because Christ has overcome, we too can overcome. “**You are of God, little children, and have overcome ... because greater is He [Christ] Who is in you** than the one [Satan] who *is* in the world” (I John 4:4).

You are also taught that in this life you will have various trials to *test* and *perfect* your faith—and to teach you to *depend* on God for help. Peter has much to say about this necessary aspect of your calling: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you *which is taking place to test you*, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you. But to the degree that you have a share in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice; so that, at the revelation of His glory, you also may rejoice exceedingly” (I Peter 4:12-13). Indeed, you are called to have your faith and commitment tested—“because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that [you] should follow in His footsteps” (I Peter 2:21). It is through such trial and testing that God will prove your faith: “In this you yourselves greatly rejoice; though for the present, if it is necessary, you are in distress for a little while by various trials, in order that **the proving of your faith**, which is much more precious than gold that perishes, **though it is being tested by fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ**” (I Peter 1:6-7).

But God’s Word also promises, “No temptation [or trial] has come upon you except what is common to mankind. For God, Who *is*

Him (Acts 5:32). If your heart is willingly obedient, He *promises* to give you the guidance of His Spirit and the understanding of His Word. Remember, the *doers of the law* shall be just before God (Rom. 2:13).

There's a story of a musician who was walking down the street in New York one day, when a car pulled up beside him and someone called out, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" The musician answered, "Practice, practice, practice."

To the musician, the only way to become good enough to perform at Carnegie Hall was to constantly practice. To the Christian, the only way to become Christ-like and eventually attain His kingdom is to constantly *practice* God's way of life—the way Christ lived as our example.

An aspiring pianist, while preparing to perform of a new piece of music, may encounter a passage he cannot play well enough for the performance. He may have to practice playing the part slowly at first, in order to play it correctly. But as he plays the passage over and over, he is gradually able to play it at the required tempo—while retaining both the accuracy and the smoothness required for good performance.

Researchers in neurology have found that each time a person correctly repeats a skilled motion—such as in learning a musical skill—the neurological pathways involved are enhanced. After enough repetitions, the pathways are noticeably thicker, enabling the signal to travel more easily. Eventually, the action becomes virtually automatic.

To become a good musician, you must *practice* until it becomes *automatic*. To become like God, you must *practice* godliness until it becomes automatic. Paul says that we can learn much about God and the way He works from His *physical* creation (Rom. 1:20). Could it be that each time we make the choice to obey one of God's laws or precepts, we enhance our spiritual "nerve pathways" and become more skilled in godliness—putting on the very nature of God?

Following God's laws and precepts—and the perfect example of Christ—assures you that you're *practicing* godliness. Ultimately, you will become like those "who through **repeated practice** have had their senses [mind and thoughts] **trained** to discern between good and evil [and then to choose good]" (Heb. 5:14).

Chapter One

Salvation Is a Process

Critical to understanding this subject is to realize that God's salvation is actually a *process* which takes place over time—over most of one's lifetime, in fact. As the apostle Paul phrased it, you are "being saved"—*present progressive*—as long as you abide in the love of God and follow the teachings and example of Christ. "Now I am declaring to you, brethren, the *same* gospel that I proclaimed to you, which you also received, *and* in which you are now standing; **by which you are also being saved**, if you are holding fast *the* words that I proclaimed to you; otherwise you have believed in vain" (I Cor. 15:1-2; also see I Cor. 1:18).

But there is also a *definite point* at which a person is "saved"—that is, they have come to be *under* God's grace. However—contrary to the false Protestant teaching of "once saved, always saved"—this status is not *automatically* permanent. As long as the believer remains faithful to God's way of life and abides in His grace, he or she can be assured of full salvation. As we will see, the process of salvation is ultimately *complete* only when one is born into the divine family of God as a spirit-composed son or daughter of God.

Directly related to the "process of salvation" is *conversion*. In Matthew 18:3 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, **unless you are converted and become** [a process] **as little children** [childlike in heart and spirit], there is no way that you shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Peter said, "Therefore, repent and **be converted** in order that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19).

Genuine *conversion* is so much more than merely "accepting Jesus" or "giving your heart to the Lord." Conversion means *change*. It begins with sincere, heartfelt *repentance* of sin—the transgression of God's law—and beseeching God for His forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ's sacrifice. And while it begins with repentance and baptism, conversion is a *process*—a lifelong process of *change*. The entire process of salvation, however, *begins* with a special, personal calling from God Himself.

Salvation Begins with God's Calling

Though physical, God has given to every man and woman a *human spirit*—called the "spirit in man"—which gives life, consciousness and the capacity to think, imagine, plan, and **make decisions and**

choices. Because of this “spirit in man” (Job 32:8; Eccl. 3:21), our minds are able to grasp abstract concepts like mathematics or economics. However, as amazing as the human mind is, we are *unable* to grasp certain *higher* spiritual concepts of God necessary for salvation. As Paul wrote, man needs an *additional spirit*—the Spirit of God: “For who among men understands the things of man except by the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way also, the things of God no one understands except by the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:11).

In is through this *same* Spirit that God the Father *personally initiates* your calling, spiritually drawing you to Him through Jesus Christ. “**No one can come to Me [Christ] unless the Father, Who sent Me, draws him...**” (John 6:44). Certain spiritual concepts are revealed by the Spirit of God as He begins to *work with* your mind and spirit. God begins by enlightening your mind, giving you the *desire* to seek Him, the desire to understand His way, and the willingness to follow Him.

The Spirit of God—the Spirit of the truth (John 14:17)—brings you to understand the *choices* God puts before each of us. All have lived the “way of man”—the antithesis of God’s way (Eph. 2:1-3; Isa. 55:8)—the way that *seems right*, but one that leads to death. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof *is* the way of death” (Prov. 14:12; also see 16:25). Indeed, “all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits.... Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes, but the LORD ponders the hearts” (Prov. 16:2; 21:2). The prophet Jeremiah wrote that the human heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...” (Jer. 17:9).

In time, as God continues to work with you, you will come to see yourself as God sees you. Ultimately, God will lead you to repentance through His grace. Notice what Paul wrote: “[Do] you despise the riches of His kindness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the graciousness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). It is through God’s *grace* that you come to see the wickedness of your own human nature—to comprehend the enormity and consequences of your sins—to understand to the depths of your being what sin really is!

Through His grace, God draws you to Christ—giving you *faith* or *belief* in Jesus. Where does this belief come from? How is it that you come to believe? The fact is, we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior *through God’s grace*! Paul refers to the saints as those “who had **believed through grace**” (Acts 18:27).

Yet, *why* is it often difficult to choose God’s way? It is because of our carnal minds, the nature all humans are born with. Human nature wants its own way, not God’s way. Humanly, we simply do not want to obey God. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not

that when you fellowship with those who have God’s Spirit, you’re also fellowshiping with God Himself (I John 1:3). When you help other people, you’re helping Christ (Matt. 25:31-48). You are doing to others as you would have them do to you (Matt. 7:12). In so doing, you are following Christ’s own example—and learning to become more like Him.

Living God’s Way of Life

We’ve discussed several tools for spiritual growth, such as prayer and Bible study. However, all of your efforts at laying a foundation of faith by learning *about* God can be defeated if you *forget* God in your daily life and simply live as you always have. As you grow in the knowledge of God’s ways, you need to *apply that knowledge in your life*. You need to *live the life* of a true Christian, motivated by godly love; you must be dedicated to following Jesus’ example in every aspect of your life—in each waking moment, as each choice and decision comes along. You need to prayerfully ask how Christ or other godly people in the Bible would handle various situations—and which of God’s laws would apply. Never forget—you are *in training* for eternal life!

The experience—the *practice*—of living by God’s standards and precepts, and the character built by *doing* the right thing at the right time, will enhance your spiritual growth and help you to truly become more like Jesus Christ and the Father. Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:11-15 of *building* on the foundation of Jesus Christ (the knowledge of Him, His teachings and example): “For no one is able to lay any other foundation besides that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now **if anyone builds upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or stubble, the work of each one shall be manifested**; for the day of *trial* will declare *it*, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall prove what kind of work each one’s is. If the work that anyone has built endures, he shall receive a reward. If the work of anyone is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but *he* himself shall be saved, yet as through fire.” As you diligently *live by* Christ’s example, the more solid your foundation will be—as well as the spiritual superstructure you build upon it.

Jesus said, “**If you continue in My word**, you are truly My disciples” (John 8:31). What did Jesus mean by “continue in My word”? The one who hears God’s words and *puts them into practice*, Christ likens to a wise man (see Matthew 7:24-27). You “continue” in His Word by *applying* it in your life. The key to understanding God’s Word is *obedience*—for God gives His Spirit only to those who *obey*

day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy [time] of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor pursuing your own desires, nor speaking *your own* words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it” (Isa. 58:13-14). The Sabbath—like no other day—provides a special opportunity to draw close to God the Father and Jesus Christ. Just as the Word of God is *living* (Heb. 4:12), the Sabbath is likewise *spiritually alive*, as it were. Through the Holy Spirit, God is uniquely present *in* the Sabbath day.

In fact, your Sabbath and holy day fellowship with God is the key to your eternal life! If you are truly called and converted by God, if you possess and are *led by* the Holy Spirit of God, then you *belong* to Him—“you are not in *the* flesh, but in *the* Spirit, if *the* Spirit of God is indeed dwelling within you. But if anyone does not have *the* Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him... For as many as are led by *the* Spirit of God, these are *the* sons of God” (Rom. 8:9, 14). As a spirit-led son or daughter of God, you have a *deep hunger* for the Word of God. You also hunger for an *intimate relationship* with God the Father—crying out, in spirit, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Again, such a relationship is only possible by *fellowshipping* with God the Father and Jesus Christ *on the Sabbath day*. And such fellowship is only possible through the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Living God’s *way of life* through the Holy Spirit, living in the *love* of God, *fellowshipping* with God and Spirit-led brethren—these are the true *keys* to eternal life.

Jesus declared that He is the Lord of the Sabbath; and He observed it as our *example* by regularly attending Sabbath services at the synagogue (Luke 4:16; Mark 2:28). Sabbath services provide a key opportunity to be *fed spiritually* by hearing the Word of God expounded (Rom. 10:14-17)—and the Sabbath is a wonderful time to fellowship with your spiritual brethren. Indeed, fellowshipping with other true believers on the Sabbath *is absolutely vital*—and will greatly enhance your spiritual growth and development. There is no better time than the Sabbath to discuss biblical topics with those of *like mind*—“iron sharpening iron” (see Prov. 27:17). And sharing your life with others is what godly love is all about. By fellowshipping and communicating with other Christians—especially on the Sabbath—you become more aware of opportunities to give, serve and help (Phil. 2:4).

Today, much of God’s Church is scattered. Many have little or no opportunity to attend organized Sabbath services, and must keep the Sabbath alone or in small groups. This makes it all the more important to reach out to one another—to be mindful of the needs of others—to make sure that no one is lacking in Sabbath fellowship. Keep in mind

subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it be.... Because the creation was subjected to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who subjected it in hope, in order that the creation itself might be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:7, 20-21).

God subjected humans to a selfish, carnal nature with the hope that—in spite of our natural pulls—we might ultimately *choose God’s way*, the way to eternal life. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). A few verses later, He summed up for His disciples what *that way* consists of: “If you love Me, **keep the commandments—namely, My commandments**” (verse 15). It is the same choice God placed before ancient Israel when He said, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, **choose life**, so that both you and your seed may live” (Deut. 30:19).

The true Christian makes the deliberate *choice* to live God’s way when he or she accepts God’s *freely given* salvation—His under-served *grace*—through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Repentance and Justification

On the day of Pentecost, Peter said to the crowd, “**Repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins**, and you yourselves shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Repent of what? Of your old ways of breaking God’s laws—from doing what seemed right in your own eyes. Repent of “dead works” of the flesh (Heb. 6:1; 9:14; Gal. 5:19-21). Repent of *living in sin*.

But what is “sin”? Too many have only a hazy idea of what defines sin, and therefore don’t really understand *what* they are to repent of. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law, for **sin is the transgression of the law**” (I John 3:4, *KJV*). The Bible’s definition of “sin” is *the breaking of God’s law*. The law of God *defines sin* and shows people *how to live their lives*. The ceremonial laws of ancient Israel, or the picky regulations of Pharisaical Judaism, or man-made codes of conduct imposed by corporate church organizations—*none* have such a spiritual purpose. *Only* the eternal law of God shows mankind *how to live*—and thus sin is defined as the breaking of that same law.

True repentance—the *prerequisite* for the receipt of God’s grace and forgiveness of sin—involves an abhorrence of sin and your *complete surrender* to God and His way. “ ‘Wash yourselves, **make**

yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; **cease to do evil**; learn to do good.... Come now, and let us reason together,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool' " (Isa. 1:16-18). "**Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts**; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

The description of repentance is the same in the New Testament—*turn from* the way of sin and begin to *obey* God. James, the brother of Jesus, writes, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. **Cleanse your hands**, you sinners, and **purify your hearts**, you double-minded!" (James 4:8). Notice what Paul wrote to the Romans: "[The] hearers [alone] of the law are not just before God, but **the doers of the law shall be justified**" (Rom. 2:13).

Paul is *not* saying that one is justified "by" obedience to the law. He is saying that one cannot be justified if they are unwilling to *begin* obeying the law. The prerequisite for forgiveness is to *turn from* transgressing the law—to *stop sinning*. You cannot be forgiven *in your sins* while you deliberately *continue* to commit them; you can only be forgiven for your *past* sins as you are *turning from* them. Of course, it is understood that we all sin occasionally—because we are weak and carnal. But the *intent* of the heart is to not *practice* sin as a *way of life*.

When one truly repents of sin before God and asks for His forgiveness, it is *only then* that the blood of Christ is applied, canceling out the believer's past sins and paying the debt of the death penalty which had been incurred through sin. John tells us, "[The] blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7). Paul adds, "Not by the blood of goats and calves, but by the means of His own blood, He entered once for all into the holiest, having by Himself secured everlasting redemption for us" (Heb. 9:12).

After you have repented and received forgiveness for sins, the next step is to be baptized by immersion in water—not into a church organization, but into the *spiritual body* of Christ (Acts 2:38; Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism symbolizes following Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. Paul wrote, "Or are you ignorant that we, as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through the baptism into the death; so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, in the same way, we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4).

After baptism, the new believer is granted God's Holy Spirit by prayer and the laying on of hands. "Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17). What we receive at this

of his repentance, David fasted after Nathan the prophet confronted him over his sin with Bathsheba and his orchestration of her husband's death (II Sam. 12:1-20). Psalm 51, written by David, is reputed to be part of the prayer he prayed to God during this fast.

A spiritual fast involves abstinence from both food and drink. The first few times you fast, it is best to fast for no more than one full day. Anyone with a serious medical condition should use caution and perhaps fast for shorter periods. It is preferable to set aside a large portion of the fasting time for prayer, Bible study and meditation. The main purpose for fasting is to *humble yourself* before God and ask Him to help you grow in a godly, obedient attitude before Him. If you (or someone you are close to) are having an acute, serious trial or problem, fasting in humility before God can help your prayers be more effective.

It is important to bear in mind that your purpose for fasting must *not* be to "get God to do your will"—but to ask Him to show you *His* will and then give you the strength to *follow* His will. If the problem requires His intervention on your behalf, you can ask for that intervention in a humble, submissive attitude—but never demanding anything from God.

Sabbath Fellowship—With God and Brethren

Unlike those "of the world" who are caught up in the pagan holidays of the occult—such as Halloween, Christmas, Easter, etc.—the life of the true Christian revolves around the weekly Sabbath and holy days of God. The weekly and annual Sabbaths outline the very plan of God—they serve as "focal points" for those who genuinely seek to follow God. Moreover, God gave man the Sabbath for the very purpose of *fellowshipping* with Him (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; 31:13-17). It is through this fellowship that you come to know God in a highly personal way. Notice what the apostle John wrote concerning this vital aspect of the Christian's life: "That which we have seen and have heard [concerning Christ] we are reporting to you in order that you also may have fellowship with us; **for the fellowship—indeed, our fellowship—is with the Father and with His own Son, Jesus Christ**. These things we are also writing to you, so that your joy may be completely full" (I John 1:3-4). This fellowship with God is especially important on the Sabbath day. The truth is, you cannot have a growing, intimate relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ without this Sabbath fellowship.

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God has this to say about the importance of His Sabbath day: "If you turn your foot away from [trampling on] the Sabbath, *from* doing your own desires on My holy

ture into your mind and heart. For example, one can meditate on what a particular aspect of life might be like during the millennial reign of Christ—or how some particular human problem might be solved—while studying prophecies about that time. Such meditation often yields insight on how God’s Word and His laws could be applied today.

Control of your *thoughts* is at the heart of your spiritual warfare with Satan. Except for when you’re doing something that temporarily requires your full attention and concentration, your mind can easily drift off on any number of ideas, fantasies or imaginings. The question is, are such thoughts wholesome, worthwhile and godly? Satan will try anything to get a “foot in the door” of your mind. Meditation on godly matters can be a very effective tool for ridding your mind of carnal thinking. To get air *out* of a glass, you need to put something *in*, like water; to put wrong thoughts *out* of your mind, you need to be actively putting right thoughts *in*. In this way, you can learn to bring “into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5).

It is highly beneficial to set aside a time to “just meditate”—though you should have a subject in mind so your thoughts don’t wander aimlessly. Perhaps there is a particular question or a personal problem you are needing to resolve. Prayerful meditation can often start you on the path to a God-inspired solution.

If you awaken during the night, prayerful meditation in bed can help you get back to sleep. David recounted in numerous psalms how he meditated on God and His laws at night on his bed. Of the righteous man David says, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law does he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2). He adds, “My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips when I remember You upon my bed, and meditate on You in the night watches” (Psalm 63:5-6). “I have remembered Your name, O LORD, in the night.... My eyes go before the night watches, so that I might meditate on Your word” (Psalm 119:55, 148).

Notice that David was always meditating on a particular topic. Remember, spiritual meditation is always about something pertaining to God or His Word.

Fasting

The prophet Isaiah outlines both right and wrong motivations for fasting (Isa. 58:1-10). Men of God in the Bible fasted when they wanted to draw closer to God—especially when they were dealing with a sore trial or test. Moses, Daniel and Jesus Christ set examples of how and when to fast (Ex. 34:28; Dan. 9:3; 10:3; Matt. 4:2).

Fasting can also help in your repentance before God. As a part

point is an *initial* portion of the Holy Spirit—like a down payment toward our ultimate inheritance of salvation. Paul writes that the Holy Spirit “is *the* earnest of our inheritance until *the* redemption of the purchased possession, to *the* praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:14). Indeed, “He Who is working out this very thing for us *is* God, Who has also given us the earnest of the Spirit” (II Cor. 5:5).

Thus, the *initial* stage of salvation is accomplished. You have been “saved”—that is, *justified* and *reconciled* to God by the blotting out of your sins (Rom. 5:9). The penalty of sin—the second death in consuming fire (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:6, 11-15)—has been removed. You are now “under God’s grace”—which you did not and could not *earn*.

Justification—being put in *right standing* with God the Father—comes by His gracious forgiveness of your past sins through Christ’s sacrifice. Through death, Jesus paid *in your stead* the penalty of death which you had earned. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, **but are being justified freely by His grace** through the redemption that *is* in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-24). This redemption is “through His [Christ’s] [sacrificial] blood, *even* the remission of sins, **according to the riches of His [God’s] grace**” (Eph. 1:7).

Of all the aspects of the manifold grace of God, *justification*—with the subsequent *gift of spiritual righteousness*—is most important. “For we also were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving all kinds of lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful *and* hating one another. But when the graciousness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we practiced, **but according to His mercy He saved us**, through *the* washing of regeneration and *the* renewing of *the* Holy Spirit, which He richly poured out upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that, **having been justified by His grace**, we would become heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:3-7).

Chapter Two

Understanding Grace

As we saw in Ephesians 2:8-9, salvation is by God's *grace*. But what is the "grace of God"? Simply put, it is God's favor, mercy or goodwill toward us. *Grace* implies that something has been done *freely* by someone who was under *no obligation* to do so—and that the recipient will never be required to "pay" for such graciousness. It is by God's freely given grace—His love, favor and mercy—that you and I are saved. God is in no way "obligated" to save us—and you could *never* "earn" such salvation. Salvation, then, is the result of God's gracious favor toward us—completely free on His part, and undeserved on our part.

God's grace, or favor, is an expression of His unfathomable love toward us—while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). As an expression of God's *love*, He "gave His only begotten Son" as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, "so that everyone who believes in Him"—which, as we will see, implies *obedience* to His teachings—"may not perish, but may have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Belief *in* Christ and acceptance of His sacrifice—coupled with genuine repentance of *sin*, which is the transgression of God's law (I John 3:4)—leads to God's *forgiveness of sin* and the *removal* of the ultimate penalty, the second death. This is all accomplished as part of the "operation of grace"—God's free, unmerited favor.

But God's grace or favor involves more than just the forgiveness of sin. To be "under grace" denotes a *continual relationship* between God and the believer—in which the believer is continually receiving God's divine love, favor, blessing, help, gifts and goodness. Grace establishes a new spiritual relationship between the believer and God the Father and Jesus Christ. Through the unearned gift of God's favor, the believer is called, chosen, forgiven and accepted by God the Father, and begotten with the Holy Spirit, making him or her a child of God and an heir of eternal life—which is granted in the first resurrection at Jesus' return.

As the Scriptures reveal, living "under grace" requires the believer to *live by every word of God* with complete love and devotion to God the Father and Jesus Christ. When God forgives you for breaking His law, He expects you to no longer *live in sin*. Grace in *no way* grants one license to *practice* sin by ignoring or rejecting the commandments of God. Only those who keep His commandments can abide in His love and remain under His grace. Every believer who receives the grace of

ans, who were commended because they diligently searched the Scriptures to see whether Paul's teachings were of God. "Now these [Jews in Berea] were more noble than those [unbelieving Jews] in Thessalonica, *for* they received the Word [as taught by Paul] with all readiness of mind *and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things* [being taught by Paul] **were so**" (Acts 17:11). These Bereans had a "readiness of mind"—they did not blindly accept what Paul was teaching, nor did they rashly reject what Paul was trying to tell them. Rather, they **carefully examined the Scriptures to prove for themselves** that Paul was, in fact, teaching the true message of God concerning Christ.

Likewise, you must *diligently search and examine the Scriptures* in order to discern true doctrine from false doctrine, true teachers from false teachers. Remember, as well, that God has given you His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to help you discern the true from the false. "And I will ask the Father, and **He shall give you another Comforter**, that it may be with you throughout the age: **Even the Spirit of the truth**, which the world cannot receive because it perceives it not, nor knows it; but you know **it because it dwells with you, and shall be within you....** [And] *when the Comforter comes, even the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, that one shall teach you all things, and shall bring to your remembrance everything that I have told you*" (John 14:16-17, 26).

Again, the *standard* by which you are to "test the spirits" and "prove all things" is the very Word of God. Indeed, the "acid test" is given by the prophet Isaiah: "To the law and to the testimony! If they [those who come as ministers] do not **speak according to this Word** [both Old and New Testaments], *it is* because *there is* no light [truth] in them" (Isa. 8:20).

Meditation

In the biblical sense, to "meditate" essentially means to "think." In the world, the term has an almost *opposite* meaning: "don't think"—empty your mind of all conscious thought by endlessly repeating some "mantra." Nearly every place in Scripture where the word *meditate* is used, it refers to *thinking about* God, His ways, or His Word (Psa. 1:2; 119:97; etc.). It is *never* emptying the mind of thought. Beware of any system of "meditation" which advocates that you empty your mind of conscious thought. That could open you up to satanic spiritual influence. Always ask God to *guide* your meditation.

Some of the best meditation comes during prayerful Bible study. Basically, you're thinking about what you're reading, asking God to help you understand, and assimilating the meaning of the scrip-

with what Jesus Himself taught. Paul instructed Titus, a fellow minister, to resist false teachings and to refute them with *sound doctrine*—according to Christ’s teachings. He wrote that a true minister must be “holding steadfastly to the faithful word, **according to the teachings of Jesus Christ**, so that he may be able both to encourage **with sound doctrine** and to convict those who are gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). Paul also warned Timothy: “If anyone **teaches any different doctrine** [than what was originally taught], and **does not adhere to sound words, even those of our Lord Jesus Christ**, and the doctrine *that is* according to godliness, he is proud and knows nothing. Rather, he has a morbid attraction to questions and disputes over words, from which come envy, arguments, blasphemy, wicked suspicions, vain reasonings of men who have been corrupted in *their* minds and *are* destitute of the truth—*men* who believe that gain is godliness. From such [false teachers] withdraw *yourself*” (I Tim. 6:3-5).

Indeed, it is as Christ said, “If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples” (John 8:31). This applies equally to ministers—and God’s true ministers teach *only* according to Christ’s word.

God’s true teaching servants genuinely love God and His Word. Unlike “hirelings” who only seek position, power and the praise of men, God’s ministers teach His Word because God’s has *called* them into such a position and given them a *gift* of teaching (Eph. 4:11). There is a genuine love of God’s people, a desire to serve and give. A true servant of God would never presumptuously assume the role of teacher; rather, God places His chosen ministers into such positions of service. Also, a *true* minister of God will faithfully preach the truth of God even at the risk of personal loss and deprivation.

When it comes to discerning between Satan’s false ministers and God’s true ministers, Christ’s advice in Matthew 7:15-20 is profound. “But **beware of false prophets** [teachers, ministers] who come to you [deceptively] in sheep’s clothing, for within *they* are ravening wolves. [How will you know them?] **You shall know them by their fruits**. They do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, do they? In the same way, every good tree [minister] produces good fruit, but a corrupt tree [false minister] produces evil fruit. A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree *that is* not producing good fruit is cut down and is cast into the fire. Therefore, **you shall assuredly know them by their fruits.**”

Examine the fruit produced by one who comes as a minister of God. If he is of God, the fruit will be good. As Paul admonished the Thessalonians, you are to “prove [test] all things” (I Thess. 5:21), to see if they are of God; you are to “test the spirits, whether they are from God” (I John 4:1). You are to follow the excellent example of the Bere-

God has a *personal obligation* to God the Father and Jesus Christ to forsake his or her old, sinful thoughts and practices and to live a new life, daily growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Again, Jesus says to all of His followers, “If you love Me, **keep the commandments...**” (John 14:15).

As a new believer, you must be determined to live by God’s laws and commandments, following Christ’s example with the help of God’s Spirit. Sin will still occur, but sin will cease to be your *way of life*. For every believer who lives under grace, Jesus Christ acts as Redeemer, High Priest and Advocate. If and when a Christian sins, Jesus—upon the believer’s repentance—intercedes before the Father to obtain His mercy and grace, thus becoming the propitiation for such sins. “However, if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, *then* we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ, His own Son, cleanses us from all sin**. If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our own sins, He is faithful and righteous, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us” (I John 1:7-10). Notice also: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And *yet*, **if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father; Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He is the propitiation** [continuous atonement] **for our sins**; and not for our sins only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world. And by this *standard* we know that we know Him: if we keep His commandments. The one who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. On the other hand, *if* anyone is keeping His Word, truly in this one the love of God is being perfected. By this *means* we know that we are in Him. Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is obligating himself also to walk even as He Himself walked” (I John 2:1-6). John also shows that the Christian under grace does not *practice* sin: “Everyone who has been begotten by God **does not practice sin** because His seed *of begettal* is dwelling within him, and he is not able to *practice* sin because he has been begotten by God” (I John 3:9).

Far from abolishing the laws and commandments of God, the personal relationship between God the Father, Jesus Christ and the true believer—which is based on grace—*establishes* the law through love and obedience.

Law, Grace—or Both?

In His *love*, God gave man at creation a fundamental law to show him *how to live*. Indeed, living God’s way is the *key* to true, last-

ing happiness. This basic law of God has existed since creation, and was later codified for the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. It is, in fact, an *eternal* law (Psa. 119:144).

When Christ was asked to name the greatest of all laws, He replied, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second one is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ **On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets**” (Matt. 22:40). Summed up, this is the *law of love*.

Notice Christ did *not* say that the two great laws of loving God and loving fellow man *replaced* the Law and the Prophets. Rather, He said the Law and the Prophets are *based on* the law of love—as instruction in *how* to love both God and fellow man. The laws of God reflect His very nature, and include the Ten Commandments, plus principles such as peace, mercy and giving. The breaking of God’s *spiritual* law—*not* the failure to perform rituals or sacrifices—is sin (I John 3:4).

After stating in no uncertain terms that He had *not* come to annul God’s laws (Matt. 5:17-18), Jesus expounded on the *spiritual application* of God’s law in the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5-7). He explained that Christians must live by the *spirit* of each of the commandments of God, not merely the letter. The “beatitudes” of Matthew five are a wonderful profile of God’s very nature—the *perfect way He lives*. This is the way Christ tells His followers to become: “Therefore, you shall be [become] perfect, even as your Father Who is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). This is your ultimate goal, and is a life-long process.

The spirit and intent of God’s fundamental law is *love*—which reflects the very nature and character of God Himself, for God *is* love (I John 4:8, 16). Each commandment, precept or statute of God reflects a different aspect of His very nature—the nature He intends for you to develop as you go through life. Practicing God’s laws is practicing godliness—building in you the habits of thinking and acting according to God’s very nature. Through your loving obedience, God is progressively *writing His laws of love in your heart and mind*. Indeed, a *new* covenant between God and man has replaced the old one. Does this mean the law of God is obsolete? Let’s read the *terms* of the New Covenant: “ ‘This is the [new] covenant that I will establish with them after those days,’ says the Lord. **‘I will [write] My laws into their hearts, and I will inscribe them in their minds’** ” (Heb. 10:16). Thus, the laws and commandments of God are just as valid today under the New Covenant as they were under the old. In fact, God’s laws are *even more binding* on the Christian because God requires obedience of His begotten sons and daughters from the *heart*, in the *spirit* of the law as amplified and magnified by Jesus (Matt. 5-7). This molding of God’s

“knowing the truth”—“*If you continue in My word.*”

How to Recognize God’s True Ministers: As mentioned above, Satan’s ministers are cleverly disguised as “ministers of righteousness” (II Cor. 11:13-15). According to Jude, such *false* teachers have “stealthily” entered in even among the churches of God, “perverting the grace of our God, *turning it* into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). How can you discern between Satan’s *counterfeit* ministers and God’s true teaching servants?

Obviously, you must be continually *close* to God the Father and Jesus Christ through prayer, mediation and occasional fasting. You must be thoroughly *grounded* in the Word of God, completely familiar with the fundamental teachings of Scripture. A good understanding of the Word of God is your *best defense* against false teachers; it is also by knowing the Scriptures that you will recognize *true* teachers of God.

A true minister of God is one who rightly “divides” the Word of God (II Tim. 2:15)—that is, he is *skilled* in handling the Scriptures, building doctrine line upon line, precept upon precept, truth upon truth (see Isa. 28:10). In presenting doctrine, a *true* teacher of God utilizes *all of the Scriptures* on a subject—never “picking and choosing” the passages that seem to support some private point of view. A true minister of God’s Word lets the Bible interpret *itself*.

Notice what Paul wrote about the apostles’ ministry: “Therefore, having this [God given] ministry, according as we have received mercy, we are not fainthearted. For we have personally renounced the hidden things of dishonest gain, not walking in *cunning* craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully [as do Satan’s false ministers]; **but by manifestation of the truth** [the correct use of the Scriptures], we are commending ourselves to every man’s conscience before God” (II Cor. 4:1-2). Unlike false teachers who use “the sleight of men in *cunning* craftiness” (Eph. 4:14), God’s true ministers *simply teach the Word of God*—understanding that *only* Scripture itself is “God-breathed and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16-17). They teach the Scriptures openly, letting God’s Word speak for itself.

Just as Paul warned the Colossians, false teachers use subtle deceit to win followers. “Now this I say so that no one may deceive you by **persuasive speech**.... Be on guard so that no one takes you captive through **philosophy** and **vain deceit**, according to the traditions of men, according to the elements of the world, and not **according to Christ**” (Col. 2:4, 8). *There is the key!* A true minister and servant of God will always teach “according to Christ”—exactly in agreement

John 4:1). Do not take *anyone's* word for *any* religious teaching—"test it" to make sure that it is "according to this Word," the Bible.

Paul writes: "Be on guard so that no one takes you captive **through philosophy and vain deceit, according to the traditions of men**, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). That is exactly what many popular preachers are doing, teaching a mixture of selected biblical passages and philosophical traditions—which ends up in *conflict* with what the Bible really says. Indeed, you cannot profess to worship God "in truth" while believing and practicing a lot of philosophical baloney that conflicts with the Word of God. *Only* God's Word—ALL of it—is the *truth* (John 17:17). You must reject all traditions and teachings that conflict with the Bible—while learning, believing and *obeying* God's Word as it is applicable to your life.

Some will say, "I can't trust myself to study and understand the Bible. I need someone to interpret it for me." It's true that you can't trust *yourself* to understand the Bible. Solomon warns, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). You need to look to *God*—not to men—for help in understanding the Scriptures. Paul writes, "For it is mandatory for the one who comes to God to believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). You need to believe that God is *real*, and that He is ready to reveal Himself to those who truly *want* to know Him.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). If God can inspire the Bible to be written, He can inspire you to understand it—if you *ask* Him to. Christ promises us, "For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it shall be opened" (Matt. 7:8). And, "Truly, truly I tell you, whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you" (John 16:23).

Concerning the Holy Spirit, Jesus also said, "However, when that one has come, even the Spirit of the truth, **it will lead you into all truth...**" (John 16:13). Christ *promises* that He, through the Holy Spirit, will guide you in your study of His Word—the *truth* (John 17:17). "Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, '**If you continue in My word**, you are truly My disciples. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free'" (John 8:31-32).

As mentioned earlier, without the Spirit of God to give us understanding, none of us could grasp the spiritual teachings of the Bible (I Cor. 2:9-14). Thus, Bible study should always begin with *prayer* for understanding. And notice the key condition that Christ placed on

very nature in the converted Christian is at the heart of developing the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5).

Is Law-Keeping Opposed to Grace?

When it comes to law and grace, is it really a case of "either-or"? Is God's law somehow *opposed* to His grace?

Let's understand. While God's laws are typically held in disdain and looked upon as a burdensome set of legalistic "rules," the Bible reveals that they are actually a reflection of His *love*—of His very nature. "For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments; and **His commandments are not burdensome**" (I John 5:3). God lovingly gave man His basic laws at creation—intended for all humanity, for all time—so we would know *how to live*. God's laws protect us—keep us from the harm, unhappiness, pain and death that comes from living contrary to God's way.

King David, *a man after God's own heart*, considered God's law a great *blessing*. Notice his positive approach to the Creator's laws, commandments and precepts: "I will never forget Your commandments, for **with them You have given me life.... O how love I Your law!** It is my meditation all the day. **Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies**, for they are ever with me. **I have more understanding** than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. **I understand more than the ancients because I keep Your precepts**. I have held back my feet from every evil way, so that I might keep Your word. I have not departed from Your ordinances, for You have taught me. **How sweet are Your words to my taste!** Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! **Through Your precepts I get understanding**; therefore I hate every false way. **Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path**" (Psa. 119:93, 97-105). He adds, "Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The entrance of **Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.... Great peace have those who love Your law**, and there is no stumbling block for them" (verses 129-130, 165).

The law of God *defines* sin so we can avoid it—like a traffic sign warns a driver of impending danger. Notice what Paul also wrote: "What then shall we say? *Is* the law sin? **MAY IT NEVER BE! But I had not known sin, except through the law**. Furthermore, **I would not have been conscious of lust, except that the law said, 'You shall not covet'**" (Rom. 7:7). In verse 12, he added: "Therefore, **the law is indeed holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good.**"

On the other hand, grace has a completely *different* operation. Through God's grace, or His divine favor, He forgives and removes

your past sins—removing the death penalty caused by those sins. This of course is accomplished by faith through Christ’s sacrifice—His shed blood (Rom. 3:24-25).

Thus, you *need* God’s grace and forgiveness because you have *broken* His law! When you repent of such law-breaking (sin), you receive His grace, whereby you are forgiven. Clearly, you do not begin intentionally sinning again by breaking God’s law!

Regrettably, mainstream evangelists often quote Ephesians 2:8—“for by grace you have been saved through faith”—in order to assure their followers that there is *nothing* they must do to be saved except to “accept Jesus” or “give their heart to the Lord.” This supposedly puts one under “grace”—which these preachers interpret to mean “no law.” They falsely portray law and grace as being irreconcilable *opposites*. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Indeed, there is a *prerequisite* for God’s grace—a *precondition*. It is simply this: If one is to come under God’s saving grace, he or she must genuinely repent of sin and have faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice and His shed blood. However—and note this carefully—this prerequisite in no way *earns* one God’s favor or grace. God’s grace is a *gift—given freely*. And God will not carelessly grant such grace to anyone who is opposed to His way of life—which is defined by His holy, righteous laws. Only those willing to fully live God’s way of life—as evidenced by their genuine “fruits worthy of repentance” (Matt. 3:8)—can come under God’s saving grace.

Similarly, there are *obligations* placed on the believer once he or she has come under God’s grace. You are to continue in God’s way of life—which, again, is *defined* by His laws and precepts as spiritually amplified in the New Testament. Why would you go back to breaking God’s laws—which would put you back under the death penalty?

The book of James shows us that law and grace (faith) go hand-in-hand. “In the same way also, faith, **if it does not have** [good] works [of obedience], is dead, by itself. But someone is going to say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ *My answer is*: You prove your faith to me through your works, and **I will prove my faith to you through my works**” (James 2:17-18).

Does this mean that Christians are perfect and never sin? No, you will always struggle against sin to one degree or another (I John 1:8-9). The key is that you do not *practice* sin as a way of life (I John 3:9). As long as you are striving to stay close to God and Christ and live by every word of God, you remain under God’s grace—even when you slip. God forgives you because you remain in a *continually* repentant attitude.

But note this critical point well: Commandment-keeping cannot

(Eph. 4:14-15). *You alone* are responsible for knowing the Bible well enough to determine whether a teaching is “of God” (I John 4:1).

Indeed, to let others do your studying and thinking for you is a huge mistake. You are warned over and over not to let anyone deceive you. Christ warned against false teachers in Matthew 24:4-5. Paul admonishes you not to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14; *KJV*). The Word of God repeatedly warns that deceivers *are* out there. Satan has not taken a holiday—and is quite busy!

Paul says Satan’s ministers *appear* as ministers of light. “For such are false apostles—deceitful workers who are transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And it is no marvel, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if **his servants also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness**—whose end shall be according to their works” (II Cor. 11:13-15).

That likable, charismatic preacher you saw on TV, who said so many appealing things, could be one of them. Many preachers deliberately teach what they think people want to hear. We must judge, not by their looks, their demeanor, or by whether we “like what they say,” but by their *message*—whether it is in agreement with the Scriptures. And you will know only if you are *studying* the Bible.

To avoid deception, you must study the Bible for yourself and *prove* what is true and what is not. You are specifically warned to “prove all things. Hold fast to that which is good” (I Thess. 5:21). Any teaching that is in conflict with Scripture must be rejected; you must be careful to never “reason around the Scriptures” in order to continue in a *private belief*. In fact, the Scriptures are not to be “interpreted” in isolation. God has inspired His Word to be written so that if one passage is difficult to understand, it is interpreted by *other scriptures*—not by human ideas (II Pet. 1:20). The whole story on a given subject is *not* all found in any one place; rather, it is “here a little, there a little” (Isa. 28:10-13). That is why you need to study the *whole* Bible and learn how to “rightly divide” the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

Both the prophet Isaiah and the apostle John warn us to *test* all would-be religious teachers by this criterion: “To the law and to the testimony [the Bible]! **If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them**” (Isa. 8:20). This is one of the most important passages in God’s Word—so mark it well. Failure to apply this admonition has led many into dangerous religious deception. John warns Christians, “Brethren, *do not believe* every spirit [every spiritual teacher], but **test the spirits**, whether they are from God, because many **false prophets** [teachers] have gone out into the world” (I

come, even the Spirit of the truth, it will lead you into all truth... ” (John 16:13).

The *key* to understanding the Bible is the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit. “For who among men understands the things of man except *by* the spirit of man which *is* in him? In the same way also, the things of God no one understands except *by* the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:11). “But *the* natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand *them* because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14). Begin each Bible study session by asking God for His guidance in understanding His Word—and His help to *live by it*. Remember, He gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

If you are to grow spiritually, there is so much you need to learn about Jesus Christ—His personality and character, His teachings and His example. You also need the teachings of the apostles, as they were inspired to expound on the way of God. And you need to understand the Old Testament, because it is the *foundation* upon which true Christianity is laid, along with Christ and the apostles (II Tim. 3:15-17).

Look at it this way: Throughout high school and college you studied textbooks and *worked* to learn what you needed to know in order to have a successful adult life, including getting a good job. You had to do it, and you did it. But that education was needed only for *this* life. The study of the Word of God is for your *eternal* life. The stakes are infinitely higher!

To combat wrong spiritual influences, you need to be putting on the “armor of God” (Eph. 6:11-17)—which will equip you for your daily spiritual warfare with Satan, the world and your own human nature. At least *three* of those pieces of “spiritual armor” are acquired through Bible study: the “girding of our loins with truth” (John 17:17), the “preparation of the gospel of peace” (Mark 1:14), and the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Heb. 4:12).

As you’ve seen, Bible study is a *key tool* for spiritual growth (I Pet. 2:1-2; II Pet 3:18). You grow in grace by growing in your *knowledge* of Christ and His teachings and the example He set—then *following* that example. (For instructions in how to study the Bible, see “Fourteen Rules For Bible Study” at the Christian Biblical Church of God Web site, www.cbcg.org.)

Avoiding Deception

In these troublesome end times, you need to be solidly grounded in the Word of God in order to discern *true* teachers from *false* teachers—and to keep the false teachers from misleading you

“earn” you salvation. Salvation is made possible *only* through Christ’s sacrifice—and is God’s *gift* to you. Paul makes this very clear: “Therefore, **by works of law** [any kind of works or law-keeping] **there shall no flesh be justified** before Him; for through *the law is the knowledge of sin* [the purpose of the law is to identify sin]. But now, **the righteousness of God** [the justification which God grants] *that is* separate from law [separate from works or law-keeping] has been revealed [in Christ], being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets; even **the righteousness of God that is through the faith of Jesus Christ**, toward all and upon all those who believe; for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:20-22).

The penalty of *past* law-breaking—which is death—cannot be erased by any amount of *future* law-keeping. *Future* obedience to God does not nullify *past* disobedience. Only continuous repentance and confession of sins—and true faith in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection—can keep you in a state of justification and salvation. But future obedience is absolutely required if you are to *remain* under God’s grace.

Faith Leads to Obedience

Faith is complete *trust* in God. It is the *belief* that God will deliver what He has promised. This belief enables and *motivates* you to comply with God’s commands. As a primary example for Christians today, it was *faith* or *belief* that motivated Abraham to obey God. “For the promise to Abraham, or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world, *was not given* through law; rather, *it was* through *the* righteousness of faith.... For this reason *it is* of faith, in order that *it might be* by grace, to the end that the promise might be certain to all the seed—not to the one who is of the law only, but also to the one who is of *the* faith of Abraham, who is *the* father of us all (exactly as it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’) before God in Whom he believed, Who gives life to the dead, and calls the things that are not as though they are; *and* who against hope believed in hope, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, ‘So shall your seed be.’ **And he, not being weak in the faith**, considered not his own body, already having become dead, being about one hundred years old, nor *did he consider* the deadness of Sarah’s womb; and **he did not doubt the promise of God through unbelief; rather, he was strengthened in the faith, giving glory to God; for he was fully persuaded that what He has promised, He is also able to do. As a result, it was also imputed to him for righteousness**” (Rom. 4:13, 16-22).

Faith and obedience are *not* mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they are inextricably linked together. James cites two examples of faith when he writes, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works [with faith] when he offered up Isaac, his own son, upon the altar? Do you see that **faith was working together with his works, and by works his faith was perfected?** And the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Now Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness;’ and he was called a friend of God. You see, then, that a **man is justified by works, and not by faith only.** Now, in the same manner also, was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when, after receiving the messengers, she sent them out a different way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, in the same way also, **faith without works is dead**” (James 2:21-26). This *living* and *acting* “by faith” is actually *obedience*. In Hebrews 11, we see numerous examples of those who *lived* and *acted* “by faith” (Heb. 11:4-5, 7-8, 11, 17, 20-23, 27-31).

Although you cannot be justified by “works” of obedience, you cannot live a life of walking with Christ without them. It is *faith*—which God gives—that makes you both *willing* and *able* to obey God and do the good works He desires (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:13).

Faith, then, is *trust* and *belief* in God, and a *readiness to obey* Him, knowing that if we do as He commands in a loving attitude from the heart, the things He has promised are sure (Heb. 11:11-19). We trust and believe God when He says He has forgiven us of our sins—and that we are to inherit salvation and eternal life with Him (Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; I John 1:9).

“Salvation by Works”?

To say that there are requirements of *any kind* for salvation is to risk being accused of teaching “salvation by works.” After all, did not Paul say, “not of works, lest any man should boast”? Absolutely. Your salvation does not come *as a result* of any works you might do. Of and by itself, even a lifetime of commandment-keeping could never “earn” salvation and eternal life. But does this negate the need to *do* good works?

Those who love to quote Ephesians 2:8-9 seldom add the *next verse*: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto the **good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them**” (verse 10). (Be wary of those who only quote biblical passages which *seem* to support a no-works doctrine. Get the *whole* story. Christ tells us to live by *every* word of God, not just a few select passages.) Writing to Titus, Paul says virtually the same thing we just read in Ephesians 2:8-10—that having received God’s forgiveness, we

Christ gave some overall principles of prayer to His disciples as part of His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 6:5-8). Then He spoke a *sample* prayer (verses 9-13). He did *not* intend the words of this “Lord’s prayer” to simply be recited verbatim, as is done today at many public gatherings. Notice: “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that by multiplying their words they shall be heard” (verse 7). Rather, each of the phrases in Jesus’ *model* prayer is given as an *example of a subject* to pray about. You are to pray about those subjects (and any others you may need to discuss with God) *from the heart*—not by rote.

Bible Study

Through prayer, you “talk to God.” But you need a *two-way* conversation with God. You need to let Him also *speak to you*. You do that through prayerful Bible study. Your relationship with God must be “in spirit and in [the] truth” (John 4:24). Christ said His very words—the Bible—are *spirit and life* (John 6:63). They are also truth—the truth (John 17:17). Continuous spiritual growth, then, requires regular Bible study.

If you’ve accepted Christ as your savior—if you’re truly converted—you will be diligently *studying* and *living* by ALL of Jesus’ teachings. As Paul admonished the evangelist Timothy, “Diligently study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of the truth” (II Tim. 2:15). Jesus said, “I [that is, His teachings and the example He set] am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Christ set the perfect example of how you are to live (John 15:10; I Pet. 2:21; I John 2:6). How can you learn from His example, unless you *read* it?

You learn God’s way of life—how Jesus Himself lived—through the study of the Bible. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4)—the inspired Word of God. You accept the free gift of God’s grace and *grow*: “Rather, be growing in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (II Pet. 3:18). By studying God’s Word, you will come to intimately know Jesus Christ and the way He lived.

Many avoid Bible study because it’s *work*—brain strain. You may have attempted to read or study the Bible, but were unable to understand. Don’t expect to understand all the Bible at once. The study of God’s Word is an ongoing lifetime project. If the first few readings don’t seem to yield much understanding, do not give up. If God inspired the Scriptures to be written (II Tim. 3:16), He can inspire you to understand them. Christ promised His followers, “when that one has

in,” they may carry around a burden of guilt, thinking God is angry with them for falling short. But nowhere does the Bible say God “requires” a set amount of prayer time each day. God does not expect you to pray by the clock. If you truly love God, you will *want* to communicate with Him frequently. If you’re praying from the heart—adequately covering your needs and the needs of others—you will spend plenty of time in prayer. In fact, it isn’t the *time* that matters, it’s the quality and effectiveness that matters in building a relationship with God.

Notice what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:10-18. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in *the* Lord, and in the might of His strength. Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil, because we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but against principalities *and* against powers, against the world rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual *power* of wickedness in high *places*. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having worked out all things, to stand.

“Stand therefore, having your loins girded about with truth, and wearing the breastplate of righteousness, and having your feet shod with *the* preparation of the gospel of peace. Besides all *these*, take up the shield of the faith, with which you will have the power to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and put on the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; **praying at all times with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit**, and in this very thing being watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

As Paul says, you should be praying for the needs of others—ministers and teachers, fellow Christians, family members, coworkers, anyone you know of suffering trials or sickness. You should also pray for God’s guidance for those in governmental decision-making positions, whose actions affect the lives of many. Prayer for others is one of the ways you grow in the unselfish *love* of God.

There are a number of examples in the Psalms of how David prayed to God. Psalm three is a cry to God for deliverance; in Psalm six David asks God to be gentle when correcting him. Psalm eight is David’s praise to God for His creation; Psalm 13 is David’s cry to God when it seemed like he had been abandoned. Psalm 51 is a prayer of deep repentance (probably after David’s sin with Bathsheba). Psalm 103 lists many of the ways God provides for His people and tells of His mercy and love. Psalm 119 is all about the countless benefits of keeping God’s law, and the converted attitude one should have toward God’s laws. Almost every reason or purpose for praying can be found in the Psalms.

must be diligent to *do* good works: “This *is* a faithful saying, and I desire you to strongly affirm *all* these things, so that **those who have believed God may apply themselves to doing good works**. These things are good and profitable for men” (Titus 3:8).

It is by developing the habit of *good works* that Christ is creating godly character in you. But it is a joint effort: God will supply the help you need—your part is to prepare yourself and be ready to “do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). You are to set an “example of good works” in all things (Titus 2:7)—yet, it is God Who will “encourage your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (II Thess. 2:17). As Paul wrote, “**God is able to make all grace abound toward you** so that in every *way* you may always have sufficiency in all *things*, and **may abound unto every good work**” (II Cor. 9:8). Notice that it is God Who will perfect you in good works. “And *may* the God of peace, Who raised our Lord Jesus from among *the* dead—that great Shepherd of the sheep—through *the* blood of *the* everlasting covenant, **perfect you in every good work in order that you may do His will; accomplishing in you that which is well pleasing in His sight**, through Jesus Christ, to Whom *be the* glory into the ages of eternity. Amen” (Heb. 13:20-21).

There is no conflict between faith and works. You must have faith in God’s forgiveness and faith in His power to save you. Neither can be earned—they are by *grace*. But you must also have the *works*—loving obedience to God’s laws—by which you develop the mind of Christ. The development of *godly nature* in us is God’s whole purpose in creating man. But we need God’s grace and forgiveness for those all-too-frequent times when we fall short of His standards.

Chapter Three

Where Do You Go From Here?

Always keep in mind that initial conversion is only the *beginning* of the spiritual *process* of salvation. During this life, after *initial* conversion, we are to *grow* “until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**” (Eph. 4:13), thus prepared for the final stage of salvation—the *new birth* into the very family of God at the first resurrection. In a continuing process of *spiritual growth*, you are to *build upon* the initial grace of God and expand your spiritual knowledge and understanding. The apostle Peter tells you to “**grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ**” (II Pet. 3:18). You need to grow in—that is, *build on*—the grace of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ that God has freely given to you.

As time goes on, God—through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit—forms in you the very *mind of Christ*, Who never once broke any of His Father’s commandments. “**Let this mind be in you**, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, and was made in the likeness of men, and took the form of a servant; and being found in the manner of man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

God is, in fact, forming Christ in you (Col. 1:27; Gal. 4:19). Your part is to remain committed to a life of *obedience* to God—to continually *seek* His love, His Spirit and to *practice* His way of life. In doing so, you develop and grow in the love of God, and more perfectly love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. This fulfills the greatest of all commandments (Matt. 22:37-38).

How do you “love God?” Christ answers in no uncertain terms: “**If you love Me, keep the commandments—namely, My commandments**” (John 14:15). “If you **keep My commandments**, you shall live in My love...” (John 15:10). John reiterates this in his first general epistle: “**For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome**” (I John 5:3).

If you are truly converted and are now led by God’s Holy Spirit, He is in the *process* of writing His laws into your mind and heart (Heb. 10:16). This process takes place over your entire lifetime. God gives you His Spirit to help you *love* Him and *obey* His laws and commandments—not only in the letter, but in their spiritual intent. The con-

of His family. You’ll *want* to grow ever closer “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” This spiritual growth in preparation for the Kingdom of God becomes the *most important priority* in your life (Matt. 6:33). How can you be sure you’ll accomplish the needed spiritual growth?

At your conversion there was a *new creation* begotten in you—an “inward man” (or woman) of the Spirit—which requires regular spiritual *nourishment* in order to grow, to be “renewed day by day.” You draw *spiritual* nourishment by *daily* contact with God through prayer, Bible study, meditation and occasional fasting. You’re also nourished spiritually by regular fellowship on God’s Sabbath with other faithful followers of Christ, and by hearing the Word of God expounded by a dedicated teacher of God (Rom. 10:17). As you gain understanding, you also grow by *living God’s way* in every aspect of your day-to-day life.

Through these spiritual tools, you will gradually come to understand the greatness of God’s love and the miraculous work He is doing in your life. You will grow to love Him with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. As you build a deep, loving relationship with God, you will become highly motivated to please Him in every way and to work *with* Him in what He’s doing in you.

Daily Prayer

God is establishing a deep, loving *relationship* with you as a begotten son or daughter. You build on that relationship by regular contact and communication with Him. Your love for God should motivate you to *seek contact* with Him daily by praying—talking with Him about your needs and the needs of others. “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6). “[God] is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Prayer isn’t something a Christian should approach casually. Left to chance, too many days can go by with inadequate contact with God. Be certain to make prayer the *top priority* of each day.

Just living daily life in this age can be difficult. You need to pray to God for His guidance, for His protection, and for the spiritual power you need to resist sin. Prayer is the all-important tool for drawing upon more of God’s Spirit for the strength you need in your spiritual struggles. Paul writes that you are to “stir up the gift of God” that is in you by the laying on of hands (II Tim. 1:6). You do that through daily contact with God.

On the other hand, some place self-imposed quotas on themselves for prayer. If a day goes by when they fail to “get their prayer

has freely given to you. There is no “requirement” as to *how much* you grow; but if you truly love God, you will *want* to become as much like Him as possible.

God gives you as a Christian a *critical role* in this lifelong process of spiritual growth. You can either help in the process by doing your part, or hinder the process by neglect, carelessness, or continuing in your old sinful practices. Or like some, you may allow false teachers to convince you that “it doesn’t matter what you do,” or that “the law is done away with.” Your part in the ongoing process of God forming Christ’s nature in you is to *put on* the “new man” by seeking His Spirit daily and by *living life God’s way*. Notice what Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus: “[Now] concerning your former conduct, [I admonish] you [to] **put off the old man**, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**; and that you **put on the new man**, which according to God is **created in righteousness and holiness of the truth**” (Eph. 4:22-24).

As Christians, we are to **follow the example of Jesus Christ** (I Pet. 2:21), Who fully obeyed the laws God established as the standard of conduct for humanity. God’s way is defined by His basic laws—the Ten Commandments in particular, along with numerous principles dealing with mercy and giving. In His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5-7), Christ outlines both the *inward attitudes* and the *outward actions* Christians are expected to manifest in their daily lives. It has nothing to do with sacrifices, rituals, vestments or artifacts; it has everything to do with loving God and fellow man.

Far from being the end, coming under God’s grace and receiving His Holy Spirit is *just the beginning*—the beginning of a lifelong *walk with Christ* to His eternal kingdom. To walk with Christ means to walk the *same way* He walked (John 14:15; 15:10). The apostle John writes, “Anyone who claims to dwell in Him is **obliging himself also so to walk, even as He Himself walked**” (I John 2:6). Jesus Christ living *in you* will walk the *same way* He walked when He was in the flesh nearly 2000 years ago—if you will seek Him and allow God’s Spirit to guide you.

Vital Keys to Spiritual Growth

There are definite *keys* to spiritual growth—prayer, study, meditation, fasting and fellowship. If you *truly* love God for all He has done for you, you’ll be serious about growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. You won’t think of these keys as a burden of “duty,” but as exciting opportunities to *work with* God in the most important project ever undertaken—the spiritual creation of new members

tinual *practice* of this obedience from the innermost part of your being builds in you the very heart, mind and character of Christ, Who loved God’s law and kept it perfectly. It is by your *keeping* of God’s law that it becomes “written in your heart.” Over time, the Christian who *loves* God and *practices* His way of life will become spiritually mature, “trained to discern between good and evil” (Heb. 5:14), and will continually grow in spiritual understanding. “But according as it is written, ‘The eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, *the things* which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ **But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things—even the deep things of God.** For who among men understands the things of man except *by* the spirit of man which *is* in him? In the same way also, **the things of God no one understands except by the Spirit of God.** Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that *is* of God, so **that we might know the things graciously given to us by God**; which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but **in words taught by the Holy Spirit in order to communicate spiritual things by spiritual means**” (I Cor. 2:9-13).

To put it simply, *God’s part* in the process of forming Christ in you is converting you and giving you His Holy Spirit, by which He guides and strengthens you to live His way. *Your part* in this process is praying daily to God, studying His Word, prayerfully meditating on it, and then *living by it*. This includes bringing even your *thoughts* under obedience to God’s commands. “For although we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the overthrowing of strongholds, casting down vain imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ**” (II Cor. 10:3-5).

Salvation Leads to a New Spiritual Creation

What God is *creating in you*—through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit—is Christ *in you*. Paul wrote, “My little children, for whom I am again laboring in pain until **Christ has been formed in you...**” (Gal. 4:19). And, “To whom God did will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ [formed] in you**, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Through the life-long process of God *living in you*, the “old man” of your carnal human nature is gradually **replaced with the inward “new man” of God’s nature**. Paul declared, “I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live. *Indeed*, it is no longer I; **but Christ lives in**

me. For *the life* that I am now living in *the flesh*, I live by faith—that *very faith* of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). It is by this process of allowing Christ to live in and through you that your “outward man is being brought to decay, yet [your] **inward man is being renewed** day by day” (II Cor. 4:16). Indeed, you are to “put off the old man together with his deeds,” as you “**put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him Who created him**” (Col. 3:9-10).

Thus, each converted, spirit-led Christian is being developed into a *new person* or a *new creation spiritually*. “Therefore, if anyone be in Christ, **he is a new creation**: the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (II Cor. 5:17). Again, this is accomplished through the working of God’s Spirit conjointly with our human spirit. “For as many as are led by *the Spirit of God*, these are *the sons of God*. Now you have not received a spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you have received *the Spirit of sonship*, whereby we call out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit itself bears witness **conjointly with our own spirit**, *testifying* that we are *the children of God*” (Rom. 8:14-16).

Notice how the apostle Peter describes this process of personal growth and development based on God’s wonderful promises: “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in *the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord*, according as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain to life and godliness*, through the knowledge of Him Who called us by *His own glory and virtue*; through which He has given to us the greatest and *most precious promises*, that through these **you may become partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption *that is in the world through lust*. And for this very reason also, having applied all diligence besides, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance; and to endurance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly love; and to brotherly love, the love *of God*. For *if* these things exist and abound in you, they *will cause you to be* neither lacking effort nor lacking fruit in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 1:2-8).

As we continually “stir up” and draw upon the gift of God—His Holy Spirit in us (II Tim. 1:6)—and follow Christ’s example of how to live (I Pet. 2:21-22; I John 2:6), God will *develop in us* the love, mind, attitude and very nature of Jesus Christ until we all “come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, **unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**” (Eph. 4:13).

The process of salvation ultimately culminates in your *new spiritual birth* into the family of God—as a spirit-born son or daughter of God. For those who *remain faithful* throughout their lives, this final

step of entering the Kingdom and family of God takes place through the *first resurrection* at the return of Christ. Those who have died in the faith will be raised from the dead, while those who are still alive will be *transformed*—empowered with immortal spirit bodies to inherit eternity (I Thess. 4:16-17; I Cor. 15:23, 49-52).

As glorified spirit beings, we will receive the full inheritance of the earth and the universe. “Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, **heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**—if indeed we suffer together with Him, so that **we may also be glorified together with Him**. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with **the glory that shall be revealed in us**” (Rom. 8:17-18). We will be exactly like Christ Himself, Who will “**transform our vile bodies**, that they may be **conformed to His glorious body**, according to the inner working of His own power, *whereby He is able* to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:21). We will also rule with Christ over all that God the Father has put “under His feet” (Heb. 2:8; Rev. 3:21; 20:4-6; Dan. 7:27).

As you can see, this life is a *time of preparation* for godly rulership. Who will Christ have assisting Him in the age to come? Only those who have developed godly minds, attitudes and character by *living His way* in this life—who have *grown* in the grace which He gives as a free gift (II Pet. 3:18; Luke 19:11-26).

Salvation Requires Your Active Participation

Let’s say you’ve accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, having repented of your sins. You are forgiven for your violations of His law, and the death penalty has been removed. You’ve received God’s grace and His Holy Spirit. You know your works did not gain you salvation, nor will any works you may do in the future; but God, by His grace, bestowed this free gift upon you through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Where do you go from here? What are you to “do” with this gift of salvation? Do you continue as you’ve always lived, as if nothing has changed in your life? *Is spiritual growth really required?* Perhaps that’s asking the wrong question. Look at it this way: If you’re only willing to do what is “required,” that makes you no more than an “unprofitable servant” (Luke 17:10). Indeed, if any lesson stands out in the parable of the pounds, it is that God expects you to *develop* whatever gift He gives you (Luke 19:11-27).

As mentioned, Peter tells you to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 3:18)—that is, *build on* the grace of God and the knowledge of Jesus Christ that God